

The Gift of Balance

January 5, 2013

Close your eyes and watch your breath. Watch it all the way in, all the way out.

Make sure you stay with the breath. Nobody else is going to be riding herd on you. You've got to be responsible for your own mind, because your mind is responsible for your life. The things you do and say and think: Where do they come from? They come from the mind. And if the mind isn't trained, it's going to create a lot of problems. But if it is trained, you can lead a life that doesn't harm yourself, doesn't harm anybody else, and brings the happiness that you want. That's why training the mind is so important.

But again, nobody else can train it for you. You've got to focus on what you're doing and saying and thinking and *why* you're doing and saying and thinking those things. That requires that you be really alert and that you keep in mind what you should and shouldn't be doing and saying and thinking.

That means mindfulness and alertness: two qualities you really need to develop. They're the qualities we strengthen as we focus on the breath in this way because you've got to be mindful of the breath and you've got to be alert to what the breath is doing. And as you strengthen those qualities around the breath, then they get stronger in other areas of your life as well so that you can take responsibility for yourself.

Because ultimately you're the only person you really can be responsible for. We may have our children and other people that we're financially responsible for or that we've had some influence on, but they're the ones who are going to decide what they're going to do and say and think. You're the one who has to decide what *you're* going to do and say and think. If you spend a lot of time worrying about their choices and you neglect your own choices, you're really abandoning the one area where you really can make a difference in your life. So you've got to focus right here. Take care of yourself.

Luang Pu Suwat, the founder of the monastery, once said, "Even though there are many, many people in the world, each of us only has one person": in other words, the person right here who you're responsible for, whose thoughts and words and deeds you're responsible for.

So focus on your responsibilities. That way, you set a good example for other people.

As the Buddha said, life is like being an acrobat on another acrobat's shoulders. You have to maintain your balance; you can't try to maintain the other person's

balance. And the same about the person whose shoulders you're standing on: That person has to look after his or her balance, too. As each of us is looking after our own balance, we all get across the tightrope safely.

So you've got to develop the qualities of mind that make you more sensitive to when you're losing balance and get yourself back into balance. That way, you're giving a gift to yourself and to the people around you.